KODANSHA COMICS

CHAPTER 181

KEI SASUGA

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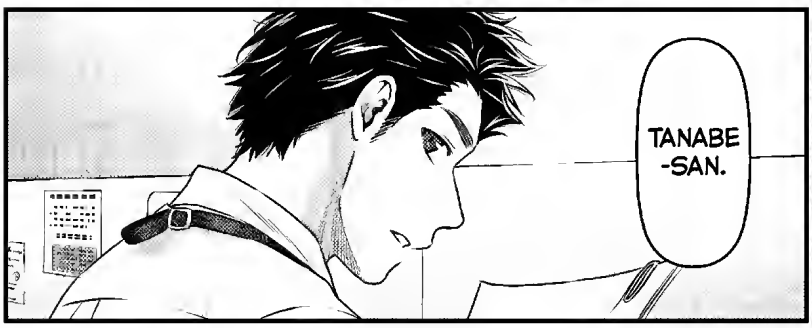
CHAPTER 181: STALKER

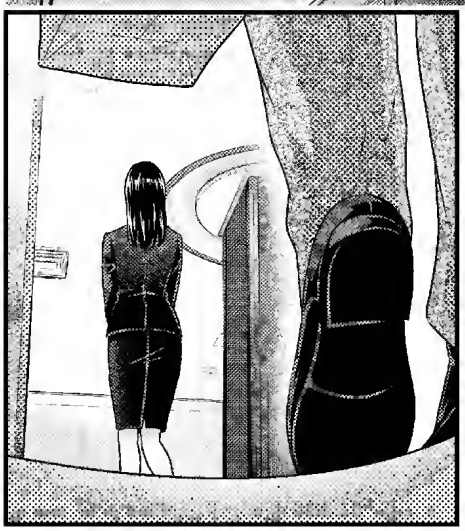
THIS ...
...ISN'T NATSUO'S HAND-WRITING.
Hina Tachibana
Natsuo Fujii

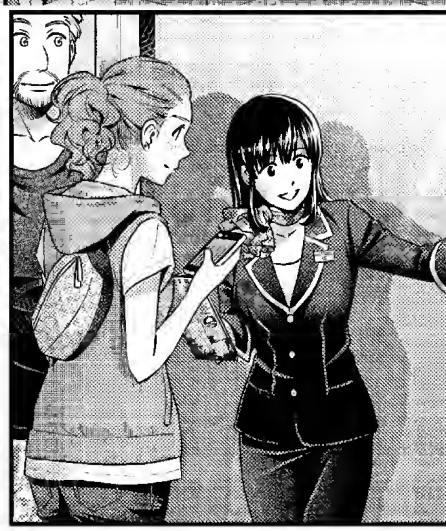
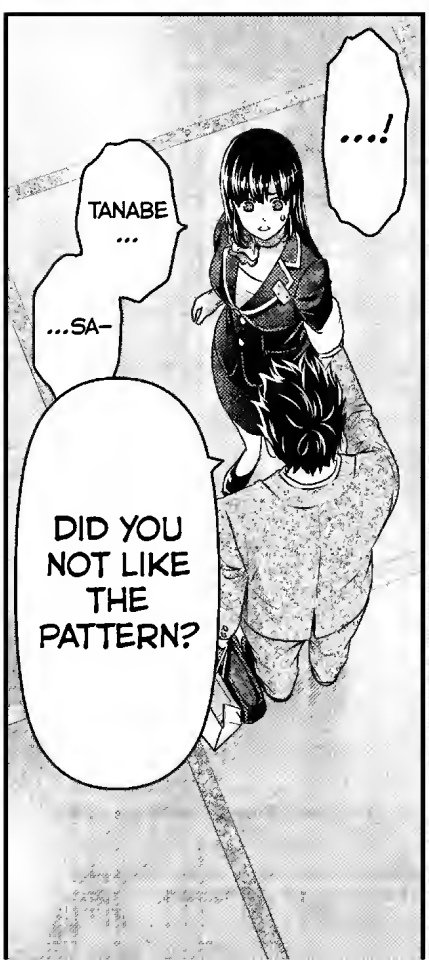
COM-ING!
DELIVERY!


TANABE -SAN.

HM?
WHAT COULD IT BE?
YOU GOT A PACKAGE.
IT'S KIND OF BIG.

I'm sorry.
I don't want any part
in your self-gratification.
Hina Tachibana.
SHRRRR
IT'S FROM A TACHIBANA-SAN
GIRU
MPU
I SWEAR, WHAT A STUBBORN WOMAN.
...!





...!
TANABE...
...SA-
DID YOU NOT LIKE THE PATTERN?

GRAB
Tachibana

...
THAT'S NOT...
THEN WHY DIDN'T YOU KEEP THEM?
I TOLD YOU, I DIDN'T SEND THESE BECAUSE I EXPECT ANYTHING IN RETURN.
IT WAS SIMPLY A KIND GES-TURE.
AND YOU JUST TRAMPLE ALL OVER MY GOODWILL BY SENDING THEM BACK TO ME? DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S A LITTLE INSENSITIVE?
I'M TRYING TO START OVER FRESH WITH YOU, HINA-SAN.
I SPENT A LOT OF TIME AND EFFORT PICKING OUT SKIRTS THAT SUIT YOU.
HRR
GRR
WHAT WAS THERE NOT TO LIKE?
LET–
OR ARE YOU JUST PLAYING HARD TO GET?
IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN IT'S POINT-LESS.
LET ME GIVE YOU SOME ADVICE. NOTHING GOOD WILL COME FROM TAKING THIS KIND OF ATTITUDE WITH–
EX-CUSE ME, SIR.
HAS OUR STAFF OFFENDED YOU IN SOME WAY?
Tachibana

I APOLOGIZE, BUT TACHIBANA IS ON THE CLOCK AT THE MOMENT.
THERE'S QUITE A LOT OF WORK TO BE DONE, SO IF YOU WILL EXCUSE US.

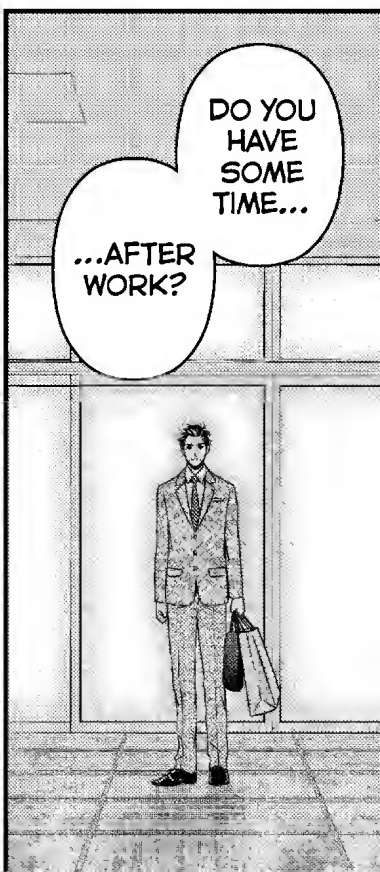
...
NO...
THEN MAY I ASK IF YOU TWO ARE ACQUAINT-ED?

TH-THANK YOU...

SORRY.
WHAT DID I TELL YOU? NO CHATTING ON THE JOB.

WHAT ?!
THE GUY YOU DUMPED AMBUSHED YOU AT WORK?!

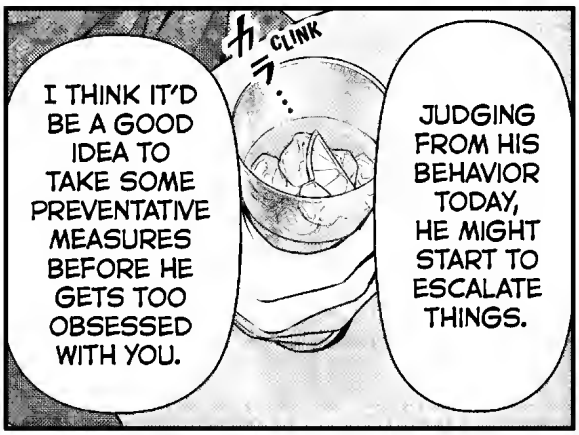
カチ飲み放題酒場

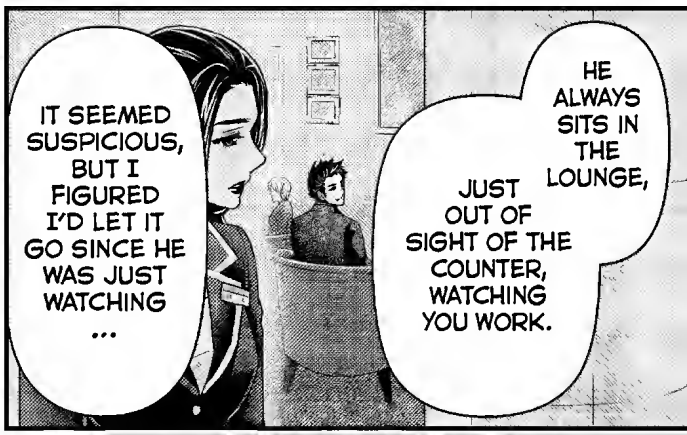

DO YOU HAVE SOME TIME...
...AFTER WORK?

...
WHAT?
HM?
OH, NOTHING.
GOD, WHAT A CREEP!
AND HE SENT YOU A PRESENT UNDER A FAKE NAME? THAT'S MESSED UP!
THEN WHEN YOU SEND IT BACK, HE SHOWS UP ASKING WHAT YOUR DEAL IS? HE'S NUTS! CALL THE COPS ON HIM!
I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING.
I CAN SEE IT IN YOUR EYES!
EXCUSE ME FOR HAVING SHITTY TASTE IN MEN!
SORRY I TOLD HER GIVE THE GUY A CHANCE!
YEAH, YEAH! I KNOW!
SERIOUSLY, THOUGH. HE'S BASICALLY STALKING YOU, RIGHT?
YOU SHOULD REALLY CONSIDER TALKING TO THE POLICE ABOUT THIS.
NO.
I DON'T WANT TO GET THE POLICE INVOLVED SINCE HE'S NOT HARASSING ME YET.
PLUS, HIS FATHER IS A CLIENT OF MY MOTHER'S,
SO I DON'T WANT TO MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF IT.
BUT NO MATTER WHAT I SAY, HE WON'T GIVE UP.
I'M NOT SURE WHAT I'LL DO IF THIS CONTINUES...

I'VE BEEN SEEING HIM AROUND THE HOTEL A LOT LATELY.
HUH ?

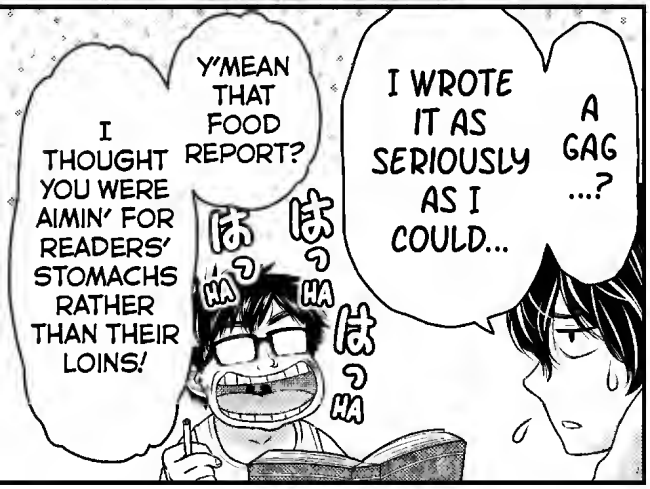
THIS ISN'T THE FIRST TIME HE'S SHOWN UP.
THAT'S TOUGH.

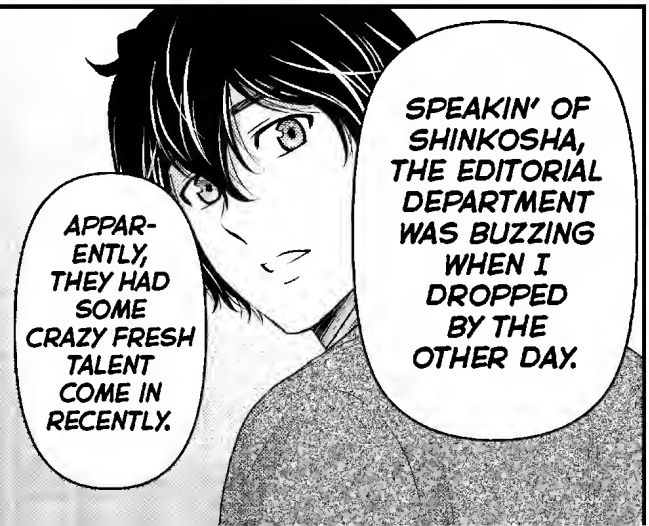

I THINK IT'D BE A GOOD IDEA TO TAKE SOME PREVENTATIVE MEASURES BEFORE HE GETS TOO OBSESSED WITH YOU.
CLINK
JUDGING FROM HIS BEHAVIOR TODAY, HE MIGHT START TO ESCALATE THINGS.


IT SEEMED SUSPICIOUS, BUT I FIGURED I'D LET IT GO SINCE HE WAS JUST WATCHING ...
HE ALWAYS SITS IN THE LOUNGE, JUST OUT OF SIGHT OF THE COUNTER, WATCHING YOU WORK.

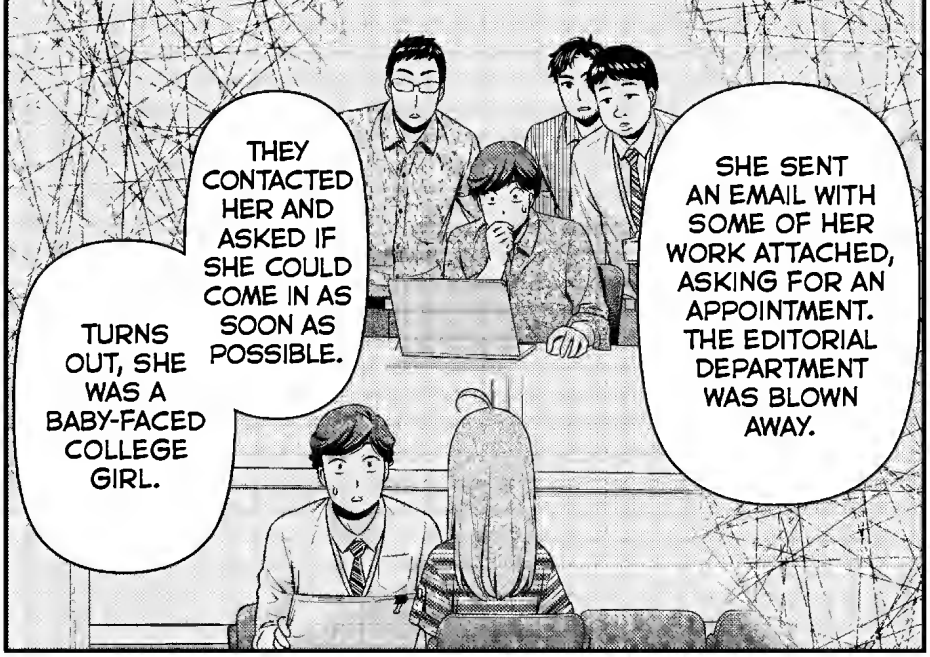
FOR NOW, LET'S TRY TALKING TO THE MAN-AGEMENT.

YES. I GOT A CALL FROM TSUTAYA-SAN.
HE SAID MY BOOK MADE IT THROUGH THE MEETING.
CIVIL LAW
OH?
FWOOO
SO, IT'S SETTLED, EH?

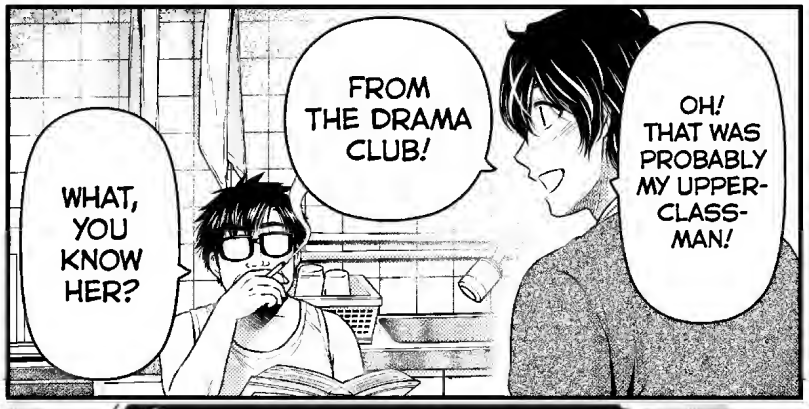

I WROTE IT AS SERIOUSLY AS I COULD...
A GAG ...?
Y'MEAN THAT FOOD REPORT?
I THOUGHT YOU WERE AIMIN' FOR READERS' STOMACHS RATHER THAN THEIR LOINS!
はっ HA
はっ HA
はっ HA

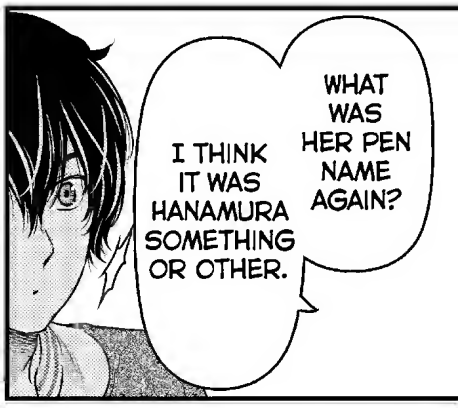

SPEAKIN' OF SHINKOSHA, THE EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT WAS BUZZING WHEN I DROPPED BY THE OTHER DAY.
APPAR-ENTLY, THEY HAD SOME CRAZY FRESH TALENT COME IN RECENTLY.

ER...
YOU GONNA INCLUDE THAT SMUT SHORT YOU WROTE UNDER A PEN NAME A WHILE AGO?
THAT'S GREAT.
HEH
HEH
HEH
SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS A HIT, AFTER ALL.
AS A GAG PIECE.


THEY CONTACTED HER AND ASKED IF SHE COULD COME IN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
SHE SENT AN EMAIL WITH SOME OF HER WORK ATTACHED, ASKING FOR AN APPOINTMENT. THE EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT WAS BLOWN AWAY.
TURNS OUT, SHE WAS A BABY-FACED COLLEGE GIRL.

FRESH TALENT?
UH-HUH. SEEMS IT WAS HER FIRST SUBMISSION, TOO.


FROM THE DRAMA CLUB!
OH! THAT WAS PROBABLY MY UPPERCLASSMAN!
WHAT, YOU KNOW HER?


WHAT WAS HER PEN NAME AGAIN?
I THINK IT WAS HANAMURA SOMETHING OR OTHER.

YEAH! I WON'T LOSE.
I'LL JUST KEEP DOING EVERYTHING I CAN TO WRITE WHAT I THINK IS BEST!

THIS MEANS YOU'VE GOT ONE MORE OBSTACLE STANDIN' IN YOUR WAY.
SURE THAT WAS A GOOD IDEA?

SHE'S A PLAYWRIGHT. I TOLD HER SHE SHOULD SUBMIT HER WORK.
I THOUGHT IT'D BE A WASTE NOT TO SHARE IT WITH THE WORLD.
OH, YEAH?

SOUNDS LIKE HE'S TOTALLY CONQUERED THE PRESSURE.
THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE GONNA WRITE FOR THE BOOK ADDITIONS YET?
...
PARTIALLY, I WAS INSPIRED BY THAT UPPER-CLASSMAN'S SCRIPT.
BUT I'M GONNA NEED A LOT OF RESEARCH IF I WANT TO TACKLE A THEME LIKE THAT.
YEAH, ABOUT THAT. I THOUGHT I MIGHT TRY TAKING ON SOME GENRES I'VE AVOIDED SO FAR.
SUSPENSE, CRIME DRAMA...
STORIES LIKE THAT USUALLY END UP FOCUSING ON LOGISTICS,
BUT I'D LIKE TO TRY WRITING SOMETHING THAT DELVES MORE INTO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIDE OF THINGS.
...I'M GATHERING MATERIAL FOR A NONFICTION PIECE AT THE MOMENT.
I'LL BE TALKING TO THE FAMILIES OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN TRAUMATIC INCIDENTS AND HEARING THEIR STORIES.
WANNA TAG ALONG?
REALLY?!
ABSO-LUTELY!

PSHHHH
HEY, RUI. HEADING HOME?
WHAT A COINCI-DENCE.
I'LL SAY.
YOU LOOK EXHAUST-ED.
HUH? I DO?!
YEAH. HARD DAY AT WORK?
NOT REALLY...
OH, GOD. AM I GETTING OLD?
YOU OKAY? ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?
YEAH, I'M FINE.
WHAT ABOUT YOU? EVERYTHING GOING OKAY WITH THAT ONE CO-WORK-ER?

WELL,
LIFE'S JUST FULL OF TRIALS AND TRIB-ULATIONS.
DON'T GIVE IN!
I GUESS?
I GET THE URGE TO KICK HIM ABOUT FIVE TIMES A DAY, THOUGH.
癒しの草津へ
安らぎともてなしの名湯へ
KUSATSU, LAND OF HEALING
LET OUR FAMOUS BATHS AND WARM HOSPITALITY SOOTHE YOUR SOUL.
You're always welcome in Kusatsu.
心よりお待ち申し上げます
...
HEY.
NEXT WEEK-END,
WANNA GO ON A HOT SPRINGS TRIP TOGETHER?

AHH...
I NEEDED THIS...
I'M SURPRISED YOU FOUND A PLACE WITH PRIVATE OPEN-AIR BATHS AND MINI SAUNAS.
THIS MUST BE WHAT A DETOX FEELS LIKE...
I CAN FEEL THE HEAT PULLING SWEAT OUT OF EVERY SINGLE PORE.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE WENT SOMEWHERE TOGETHER. I SEARCHED MY BUTT OFF...
CAN WE GET OUT YET?
WHEN THE LAAAST GRAIN OF SAND IN THAT HOUR-GLASS FALLS.
JUST A LITTLE LONGER.
THREE.
TWO.
ONE.
GO!
BAM

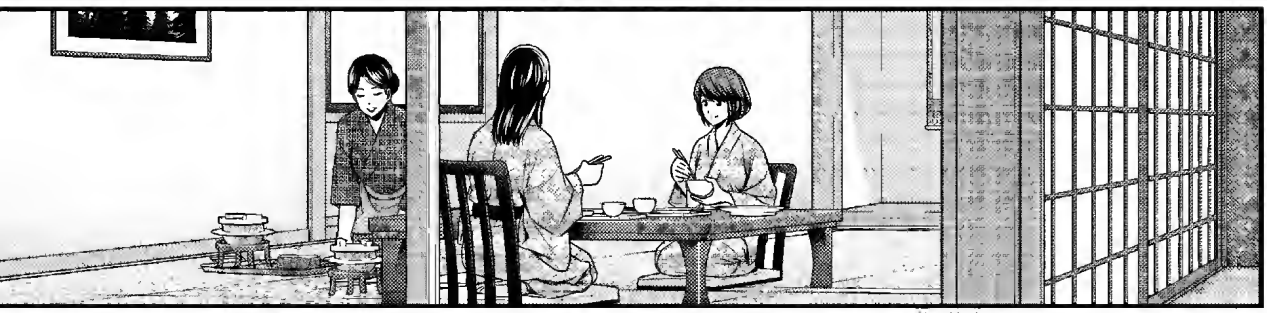
YAAAH!
SPL
OSH
EAT THIS! WATERFALL ATTACK!
WATER!
PL
UNK

GYAAAH!
BAKOOL
HEY! DON'T RUN!
YOU SUCK!
HA, HA!
WHAT'S WRONG? YOU'RE GONNA GET IN ANY–

I FEEL LIKE I'M MELTING.
CHIRP CHIRP
I FEEL KINDA BAD THAT WE'RE THE ONLY ONES PAMPERING OURSELVES.
MAYBE WE SHOULD'VE INVITED EVERYONE.
IT'S FINE. NATSUO'S BUSY WRITING EXTRAS FOR HIS BOOK, ANYWAY.
YEAH.

"EXTRAS FOR HIS BOOK"?
OH. I GUESS THEY'RE GONNA PUT OUT AN ANTHOLOGY OF HIS SHORT STORIES.
HUH ?!
HE SAID HE DIDN'T WANT TO TELL THE FAMILY UNTIL A RELEASE DATE WAS DECIDED.
THEN, UH... WASN'T IT A BAD IDEA TO TELL ME?
YEAH.
BUT... A BOOK? THAT'S AWE-SOME!
THAT PRETTY MUCH MAKES HIM A FULL-FLEDGED AUTHOR, RIGHT?!
PLOOSH
THAT'S GREAT...
HE'S GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER TO ACHIEVING HIS DREAM.
I GUESS THIS MUST BE...
...A REALLY IMPORTANT TIME FOR HIM, HUH?
...
HINA-NEE, HOW ARE ...
HEY!
WANNA CHECK OUT THE TOWN IN A LITTLE BIT?
THEY HAD ICE CREAM AND BEAN BUNS AND ALL SORTS OF STUFF!

SIGN: HOT SPRINGS ICE CREAM



RU-
ガタ RATL
RATL ガタ…
RUI?
DID YOU FORGET YOUR WALLET?
RUI? THAT WAS FAST.
ポロロン PLOOM
カラ RATL…
HE MIGHT START TO ESCALATE THINGS.
HE'S BASICALLY STALKING YOU, RIGHT?
HUH …?
ゴト TAT…
ガタ RATL
ゴト TAT